





LIBRARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY
OF ILLINOIS

A Sermon, &c.

ST. MATTHEW v. 8.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

THIS beatitude, sixth in the order as given by St. Matthew, may in some sort be regarded as the first of the series. For if we divide the eight virtues which all Christian generations are to call 'blessed,' into four pairs, and regard as the first pair the two purely inward virtues,—purity of heart, and hunger and thirst after righteousness, we shall naturally put this one, purity of heart, as being the simplest and most absolutely inward, the first of all. It is, as it were, a basis of the Christian moral character, on which the others may all be said to rest, according to the words of St. James, who tells us that the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and the rest^a. Not, of course, as though it could be perfectly possessed alone, or separately from the rest, or as though in order of time it were to be wholly won before all the others,—though it has in this way, too, a real priority over the rest, being in great measure a virtue of youth; but that when the entire moral

^a St. James iii. 17.

character of a faithful and true Christian man is divinely portrayed in eight particulars, this one may be regarded as the first in arrangement, the one out of which the others, more complicated in point of circumstance and description, naturally seem to flow.

The terms in which the beatitude is stated are entirely simple. There is not in them, as in several of the others, the least sound of paradox. There is no difficulty, such as we meet in several of the others, where we have to understand how sorrow or persecution, things naturally painful and sad, can be called 'blessed,' or how meekness can have the promise of inheriting this earth. All here is perfectly simple and plain. Neither in the first part, "Blessed are the pure in heart," is there difficulty, for man can naturally see that pureness is a blessed and sweet thing; nor yet in the second, "for they shall see God." Yet we may truly say that in these last words there is something greater than paradox: there is revelation. For these words surely open to us a truth, which naturally we could not know, of the invisible world; a very sacred and precious truth, respecting what we may call, without impropriety, *the senses of the soul*, that those who are pure in heart, and no doubt those only, shall hereafter be admitted and able to see God.

Who, then, are the pure in heart? By the heart we must, I suppose, understand the feelings and desires, the likings and affections of a man, as these

are distinguished from his more purely mental faculties and operations on the one hand, and from his spiritual capacities on the other: so that, as we distinguish the soul, specifically so called, from the spirit of a man, so we may subdivide, so to speak, the specific soul into the mind, the seat of thought, reflection, and memory, and the heart, the imaginary receptacle of the love and desire, the affections and impulses of the soul.

Purity in the heart, then, means no doubt the absence of all manner of defilement, whether it be of one sort or another, in it. Corrupt and corrupting desires,—some absolutely and in themselves corrupt, some corrupt in their excess, and faulty direction,—all such, of whatever particular kind they be, are destructive of perfect purity in the heart. Bodily desires of all sorts, desires of ambition, of covetousness, of dislike, of indignation,—all these, and such as these, as soon as they pass the limit of entire innocence in degree and direction, begin to be destructive of that perfect purity of heart which is surely meant in this beatitude. Purity is the freedom from all these. It is a clear brightness of the soul in respect of things moral: a transparent clearness, not arising from stillness, or original feebleness in the natural desires, but from the perfectly ordered activity of naturally vigorous desire towards its legitimate objects, whereby, in respect of all things moral, the soul of a man is clear before God of everything that defiles,—the lively springs

of feeling and desire welling continually up with nothing but the bright and crystal waters of a pure and holy activity. I need not say that such purity is not of nature. No ; in this beatitude, as in the others, we are reading of men as they are under the grace of the Holy Spirit, not as they are by nature. The natural activities of desire and feeling, corrupt from the first, when left to themselves grow more and more corrupt continually, so that real purity of heart is to the natural man impossible. Nothing but the divine strength and sweetness of the Holy Spirit of God given in the Body of Christ, given to prayer, can so purify these naturally foul and turbid springs, as to make it possible that fallen man should in any way reach towards that true purity of heart which the Lord pronounces blessed.

But though this purity of heart belongs, no doubt, to the whole subject of human desires, so as to require the absence of all defilement, of whatsoever kind it be, it can yet hardly be doubted that there is one sort of defilement, which from its spreading, secret poison, from its universally diffused danger, growing, as it is too apt to do, with the growth of the body, and, alas ! too often re-acting upon the body in all sorts of terrible evil ; from the hold which it gains upon the imagination ; from the way in which it is capable of being transmitted and caught from one impure mind to another, and fed secretly by all kinds of apparently innocent objects ; from the difficulty of dealing with it, and the natu-

ral (and sometimes the morbid) unwillingness which there is in men even to have it alluded to, though it may notoriously be eating out the very heart of faith in a Christian land,—there is one sort of defilement, I say, which is surely most prominent in the thought of every one who reads that only “the pure in heart shall see God.” Blessed pure in heart! Verily blessed, if there be such, those who by the grace of the Holy Spirit have been kept clean and pure in boyhood, youth, manhood; whose life has been undefiled in the midst of a contaminated and contaminating world, like a bright river, never mingling with the stagnant waters of some muddy lake through which it flows, and issuing thence at last not less clear and bright than when it entered them! And blessed too those who, having known somewhat of the opposite stain and evil, have purified themselves by repentance and confession, and have received that divine forgiveness and restoration which are never refused to such within the Christian covenant as with true, sound, and earnest intention of heart ask for it. Blessed are the pure and the purified, those who have been kept from such stain, and those in whom the stain has been washed away by timely tears, while the day of probation, the day of grace, has lasted!

“Blessed are the pure in heart, *for they shall see God.*”

What, then, is the promise of seeing God? For, no doubt, in some way all shall see Him. Every

eye, we know, shall see Christ when He cometh in judgment, even they also which pierced Him ; but that sight shall be with a wailing of all the kindreds of the earth because of Him. Those who do not see Him in love, shall surely see Him in His terrible anger when all the nations shall be gathered before the throne of His glory. And how inconceivably dreadful will the sight be to one who has gone on wilfully offending God throughout his life, without repentance ; who has trampled under foot the grace of his baptism ; steeped himself in impurity of heart, and died so ! How inconceivably dreadful it will be for such an one to stand face to face with the Redeemer whom he has despised ! now sitting on His awful throne of judgment, His countenance no longer merciful and loving, but most terrible in its almighty vengeance !

But His own, His pure ones, shall in that awful day be enabled to lift up their eyes in a faith sustained by His own most Holy Spirit, and see Him as He is ! They shall see Him looking down upon them with that unspeakable love which infuseth divine life. The quickening aspect of His gracious, pardoning love shall support their souls, which else would faint and perish at His presence. They shall see Him loving and gracious, and they shall see Him so for ever. They shall surround His throne with endless praise and endless joy, always and altogether blest in the beatific vision of the most high God, who has become their portion for ever.

For their purity of heart shall have become to them as a sacred, immortal sense, a holy faculty of vision, a divine gift of spiritual sight, whereby they shall see, and know, and feel, and be eternally upheld by the presence of God and His immortal love, while the impure are utterly blind to Him, except in His terrors, as they already are blind to all that is divine.

It is hardly a mere imagination that even here, on this dark earth, visions of beings spiritual, altogether unseen and unthought of by the worldly and sensual, may sometimes be seen by the purer eyes of innocent children. But be this as it may, certainly in many ways in which the presence and power of God are capable of being recognised and known upon earth,—as in conscience, in the events and occurrences of the world, in people, in places,—none have so purged and clear a sight as such as keep themselves from all defilement of the flesh and spirit, and by God's grace live among spiritual things by chastity and purity of heart, even while they remain in the flesh. This upon earth, and during life. But most surely after death, when the things of the earth shall have passed away, this text plainly teaches us that there shall be a great difference between the souls of men, a difference analogous to that which there is now in their bodies, a difference which may at least be understood by calling it a difference of *sense*, whereby one soul shall have some blessed gift of divine

sight, and another be utterly blind and devoid of it. And not this text only, for St. Paul teaches us that “without holiness no man shall see the Lord^b ;” and St. John further shews us that the sight of the Lord, won by purity, shall have a transforming power upon those who gain it, bringing them at once to their perfection, in likeness to Him ; for he says in his first general Epistle, “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be ; but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in Him, purifieth himself, even as He is pure^c.” See how this text of St. John falls in minutely with the doctrine which I have been urging, and supports it throughout. The sons of God purify themselves, while they remain in this life, after the likeness of the purity of Christ, because they know assuredly that when Christ comes back again upon the earth, they shall thus be enabled to see Him, as He is, in His love and grace, and so seeing Him, they shall at once be transformed—their remaining weaknesses removed, and their perfection suddenly achieved—into His likeness. Their purity of heart, won on earth by His grace, shall give them that divine power of sight, which shall bring them, on their last waking, to His immortal and sacred likeness, in which every holy craving of their souls shall be fully and for ever satisfied.

^b Heb. xii. 14.

^c 1 St. John iii. 2.

These passages, I say, confirm the doctrine that the souls of the pure win a kind of heavenly sense, necessary for the seeing of God as He is,—the God, that is, of mercy and love,—in His eternal kingdom of glory and joy. And remember, too, that striking passage of St. Luke's Gospel, in which the Lord, after explaining to His disciples "*when* the kingdom of God should come," and likening it to the suddenness and brightness of the lightning, goes on to answer their further question, "*Where*, Lord?" by the remarkable image of the birds of prey flocking to the carcase^d. As though He said, Do you then ask further *where* the Lord shall come? where you must go to meet Him? where, on all this round globe, shall the place of His appearing be, so that you may go there and be ready to meet Him if you be alive, or be buried there if you die, so as any way to be as ready as you can to fly to Him at the first news of His return? Do you ask, I say, *where*? See how the birds of prey flock to the dead body! See how, when camel or horse falls down in the midst of the wildest and most arid desert, where, as far as the eye of man can strain, no sign of animal or vegetable life is to be discovered on any side, see how instantly the dark speck of some vulture, or other bird that feeds on carrion, is to be seen on the distant horizon, sailing up from the east or west, from the north or south, to reach its far-discovered food! What sense warns that distant bird? what

^d St. Luke xvii. 37.

sight, what smell, what unknown faculty informs it that what it seeks is here? Something, like to that sense, whatever it be,—something, at least, which from that sense we may conceive and understand, will bring the just, will bring the people of God, from every quarter under heaven, to meet their risen Lord. Something, like to that wonderful and unexplored faculty which leads the bird with unerring direction to its nest, and the bee to its hive, which has been known, over and over again, to guide a poor dog to its well-known home over many miles of country wholly untraversed and unknown before, shall surely gather together the people of God from all the lands under heaven, to meet in good time their own dear Lord—whom they have believed, loved, imitated—when He returns in judgment upon the earth.

Shall we ask what the nature of this sense shall be, and how far Holy Scripture will aid us in discovering it? Surely one of these passages may be made to throw light upon the other, and we may confidently say, that whatever other elements may enter into it, yet it is in purity of heart, faithful, lifelong purity of heart, that it is promised to Christian man that he shall see God. Not by any new discoveries in devotion, not by extravagances of feeling, not by ascetic or solitary living, not by monastic vows or hard obligations of will-worship, not by any of the various indirect ways which men have devised for winding themselves up so high, as

to be above the real life and duty of their station in the world, but by simple, unpretending purity of heart in the Holy Ghost,—by purity of heart which *may* be won in the Holy Ghost in any position or condition of a Christian's life,—shall man in Christ see God. Purity of heart, sweet and innocent in childhood, strong, self-controlling, and victorious in youth, established, settled, entirely won and possessed in manhood! Purity of heart which, as it is the fairest and most beautiful of all the graces which the Holy Spirit worketh in the soul of man, the inward basis and foundation of all the rest, without which they cannot be, so is that which brings him nearest to the angelic nature, and fits him most for the presence and the sight of God!

But O! brethren, while we thus exalt the blessedness (as how can it be too high exalted?) of purity, true, life-long purity of heart, how shall we speak of those whose conscience tells them, loudly and unmistakeably, that it is not *they* to whom this sweet grace, this lofty blessedness belongs? What of those who in a greater or less degree have let their hearts know of and love that which is opposite to pureness; on whose soul there is a secret stain, unknown and unsuspected perhaps by others, but to themselves, alas! sometimes the source of the deepest and most corroding inward distress, and too often the profound secret of more real alienation from God than other men imagine, or perhaps they at all adequately realize to themselves? O!

brethren, what is the real state in respect of this most anxious and most important subject, of the social life which is all around us, and which, from the mere necessity of its contiguity to ourselves, and its extremely contagious nature, can hardly fail to have affected, with more or less of evil, many even of our own hearts? Is it not notorious, is it not beyond doubt or denial, that in this land, and in this age, the creeping plague of impurity is very near at the heart of our national life, of our faith, and of our holiness? eating it away, more or less secretly; undermining and counteracting the true and genuine efforts of holiness and restoration which are really making on many sides of us, and threatening the utmost evil to our Church and country? While the extreme freedom of our institutions offers, almost without the slightest legal check, openly and notoriously in the streets of our cities, free-trade in sin; while voluptuous and seductive literature, so to call it, and the continual reports of the public journals, supply constant food to the diseased and foul imagination; while the legitimate efforts to probe, or in any real way to reach the sore, are discouraged as dangerous to faith and morals, and so the sore is left to itself to fester and grow corrupt in many a heart that might be turned to repentance, because men persist in shutting their eyes to the truth, and resolving to believe the real inner state of hearts as good and pure as the outward manners of the world and society seem to shew them,—who,

I say, can doubt or deny that the blessedness of purity, and the extreme danger of impurity, are among the chief subjects which in faithful simplicity and truth the preacher is called upon to bring before the people? Trace the life of a man, bred up as we are, brethren, in this country; follow him from the day when he first emerges from the innocence of the nursery; trace him through the companionship of school, public or private; through the temptations of the university, of the garrison, of the city; consider how he becomes familiarized in all his life with the realities of impureness, which are only too notorious and visible on every side, and think how many a soul of man among us must be conscious of that bitter secret plague, the inward misery of the too-defiling knowledge—alas! too often more than the mere exterior knowledge—of impure sin.

O! brethren, let us not deceive ourselves! Only the pure in heart shall see God. Let no man deceive you by undervaluing or extenuating the guilt of impure sin! Let no man deceive you, as some try to deceive you, by representing that men are very much alike to one another; that there are no such great differences among them; that it cannot be believed that the amiable, kind-hearted, hospitable, fair-seeming people among whom we live, should be lost in the next world; that there is no such distinction between the lives of men as that it should be credible that so mighty a difference

should be made between them, as we believe there will be, in the day of judgment. So men do teach sometimes, and so many think; but it is a terrible deceit. The chasm will surely open in the midst of us, and will separate us from one another. It will divide us into two, and only two, companies. On the one side will be found the pure, the faithful, the penitent; and surely the rest will be on the other. But shall, then, all those amiable qualities, shall all that kindness, and family affection, and generosity, and honesty, and justice, and all those other traits which made men seem so much alike, even though they be altogether and finally dis-severed from faith and repentance,—shall these things go down into condemnation, to sweeten and alleviate, if it be possible, the society of the lost? No, surely. Remember, brethren, that stern, but certain and oft-repeated word of Christ, “From him that hath not, shall be taken even that which he hath^e.” From him that hath not the evangelical graces of faith in God and repentance of sin, all his exterior sweetness which was not of grace, and his justice, and all those other qualities which attracted the love which they did not deserve, shall be taken away. They were not his own; they were lent him. He may not keep them longer. They shall be taken away from him, and given to some happier brother, in whom, perhaps, these qualities had been wanting on earth, but who now is made perfect in Christ.

^e St. Matt. xxv. 29.

Nothing that is lovely and sweet can go down into hell. Nothing that is lovely and sweet can be wanting in heaven. No,—to die impure, to die with the heart still hankering after things impure, the imagination stained and foul, the man unrepentant, what is it but to be lost? By no express sentence, it may be, but by the divinely-lighted conscience turned into fire in the soul, those who have died impure, and impenitent in their impurity, will know at once their own wretched lot, away from the sight of God, and far from all possible joy. “In nowise shall anything enter into that kingdom that defiles^f,” “the highway into that kingdom shall be called The Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it^g.”

And remember, brethren, the words of the Prophet Daniel, how “those that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt^h.” What, may we suppose, is this eternal shame? We know that, as the Lord carried with Himself into heaven His own glorious wounds, never to be obliterated, so the just, the martyrs of God shall wear for ever the tokens and marks of their holy sufferings, whereby they fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in their fleshⁱ,—marks and tokens, base and dishonouring in the sight of dim-eyed men, but become not less glorious than immortal in the world

^f Rev. xxi. 27 ; xxii. 15.

^g Isa. xxxv. 8.

^h Dan. xii. 2.

ⁱ Col. i. 24.

of glory:—how may not these lost souls, lost for their unrepented impurity, carry on their foul bodies the eternal tokens of their filthy shame, the badges of everlasting contempt, even in the regions of the lost?

O! young men, baptized into Christ, and looking forward in Him to glory, whose hearts are even now solicited by the Holy Spirit of God to devote yourselves altogether to His service in your various stations of life, O! guard yourselves now, guard yourselves *here* against this creeping plague, this secret poison and well of misery, an impure heart! Having such promises as you have, brethren, such great and precious promises, cleanse yourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God^k! Guard your secret imaginations under the Holy Spirit! It is in the imagination that the main fuel of this sin is found,—the imagination quickened and made lively by education, and then allowed to run riot in loose talking, loose reading, luxurious living,—let not such words be once named among you, as becometh saints; neither filthiness nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient^l. Words lightly spoken and lightly heard in youth, and deeds little thought of when done or seen, often fix themselves so deeply in the memory, as to recur, uninvited and unwelcome, all through life; even in holy times, and when the soul, into the very substance of which they seem,

^k 2 Cor. vii. 1.

^l Eph. v. 4.

as it were, to be burned, loathes and abhors them. Believe me, it is by the polluting of the imagination principally, that the trial becomes to so many a fiery and fatal one; and so, the imagination which is allowed to be lax, and idle, and feed itself on all the chance, and stray, and mischievous food that may be presented to it, keeps sin alive in the soul which else might let it go, and get well of it.

But do not think that it is by any flying away from life, and station, and duty that safety is to be won. The imagination that is content to be polluted can find its food everywhere. In solitude alike, and in society; from nature, from art, from books, from newspapers; nay, from the very Word of God itself it can draw the poison it loves. In intercourse and conversation with other people such a man turns everything into evil. All that he hears, turns, as it were, sour upon his soul. Every bad word and thought clings. The good ones all fly away. Every bad neighbour attaches him; every good one holds aloof, or is distasteful to him.

O! miserable taint of unclean heart! of which I would not speak, but that I fear there may, too probably, be a secret echo to my words in the depth of the conscience of not a few, perhaps, who hear me!

But what says St. John, the loving and beloved disciple? "I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one;" "I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong,

and the Word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one^m." Ye are in your strength, — strength of body, strength of mind, strength of labour, strength of resistance, strength of will. There is no attack of the wicked one so strong, or so subtle, or so universal as that with which he assails young men on the side of impurity. And so there is no victory greater, no innocence more gracious, no self-conquest more blessed than that of high-minded, heroic, Christian purity in youth. If there is one thing more angelic than another to be seen in ordinary human life, it is a young man having the Word of God abiding in him, not unconscious of temptation, nor different in constitution and natural desire from his neighbours; who in his clear, lofty pureness of Christian grace throws aside the temptations of uncleanness of all kinds, as things with which he will have no parley nor concern; on whom such words and thoughts fall harmless; whose chastity of imagination, filled with all that is innocent, and busy with what is useful, does not admit the ideas or visions of sin, till evil spirits and evil men cease to present them. And such, I verily believe, there are among you, brethren, and by God's grace not a few; retiring it may be, and unknown sometimes, perhaps not unknown and unprized by their neighbours, but surely beloved of God and good angels, and more or less secretly the sources of blessing to all around them.

^m 1 St. John ii. 13, 14.

And do not suppose, brethren, that this lofty condition is of nature. Ask yourselves whether it be so, or no. No: it is neither of nature, nor yet so contrary to nature as that it may not be won by any Christian soul of man under God's almighty and most blessed grace. It is the gift of God to such as have used the early measures of grace well, who have kept themselves from sin in their young days, who have been pious, and full of prayers, feeding on the Word of God, keeping their hearts ever as in the sight of God, and habitually feeling themselves in His presence, realizing in youth and manhood the sweet promise of early piety and goodness.

To them, first, and most: and next, to such as having known taint, as having felt something of the bitter distress of such stain of mind, will turn round,—at any time while they are spared to live and hear of the gracious promises of God,—and, repenting of their sin, will strive with earnest and persevering intention of purpose (for nothing less than a very earnest and persevering intention will do) to purify their hearts by true confession, by hearty prayer, and life-long repentance. It is possible that they may not regain altogether, while they remain on earth, that fair brightness of soul which belongs to those who have never known of such evil. The guilt of such sin may, no doubt, be washed out by divine forgiveness for Christ's sake while man lives, but I fear that its stains, at least when they have been deep in youth, and have

dwelt some time upon the mind, are well-nigh indelible as regards the memory they leave, and the distress they bring.

But by God's mercy to the penitent in Christ, they will be washed out finally and for ever in the Resurrection. Those who are at last accepted in the Beloved, shall awake up from the dead in the likeness of the Redeemer, (and how should that be otherwise than altogether pure and holy?) and in it be perfectly and for ever satisfied. And then the pure and the purified together, the innocent and the repentant, shall find that in this cleanness of heart, this hard-won, it may be, and graciously kept cleanness of heart, they have gained that wondrous sense of the soul which, while the sensual and the impenitent can see nothing but the wrath and terrors of the Judge, will enable them to lift up their eyes, redeemed, sanctified, *saved*, to see, and see for ever, the eternal love and mercy of God in Christ to those who are made like Him at His coming.

